

The  
AQUINO  
MANAGEMENT  
Of The  
PRESIDENCY



People Empowerment



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# People Empowerment

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# Foreword

"OURS IS A government that came to power borne on the shoulders of our people; we must, therefore, govern on the basis of that same people power".

These were the very words of President Corazon C. Aquino – words that laid the foundation of the highest office of the land. For six years and four months, her people-powered presidency reflected itself in the very nature of the executive branch and on the implementation of several projects closest to the President's heart; closest, because they touched the warp and woof of our people's aspirations.

To document in part her people-powered presidency, we have compiled this series of volumes titled *The Aquino Management of the Presidency*. The first part of the series attempts to outline the evolution of the support offices and the various management tools and technology employed in the decision-making and decision dissemination processes in the Office of the President. The second part of the series, to which this volume belongs, provides a chronicle of some specific undertakings initiated by the Office of the President which, now, constitute part of the legacies of the Aquino government. The third part of the series is a summation of the Aquino government's performance during its six years in office.

This volume, "People Empowerment", takes a look at the various NGO interventions the Aquino administration caused to happen – not only because these

were strategic and of practical value at the time, but more so since active participation of people's organizations in nation-building is a basic tenet of the Aquino management of the presidency.

This series of volumes, *The Aquino Management of the Presidency*, is by no means a complete coverage of the legacies of the Aquino presidency. Some of those not documented here are contained in materials better covered by other line agencies or academic groups.

Some of President Aquino's legacies, however, will find no archive to preserve them for posterity. One would have to look at the faces and listen to the hearts of the people she touched in order to find them.

**Aniceto M. Sobrepeña**

*Cabinet Secretary*

*and*

*Head, Presidential Management Staff*

*"From the hundreds of thousands at Ninoy's wake, through millions on his funeral, to democracy's triumph last February [1986], we were one . . .*

*We were people's power. We were Filipinos without distinction to divide our resolve.*

*Now the country is back in our hands. The revolution of freedom is over. . .*

*People power can put our economy back on its feet, put food on our tables, shirts on our backs, roof over our heads, and pride in our hearts".*

President Corazon C. Aquino

*Labor Day*

*May 1, 1986*





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# Introduction

AT THE COJUANGCO building in Makati, Jose "Peping" Cojuangco Jr. was summoned by his elder sister, Corazon C. Aquino. It was a day after the parliament, the Batasang Pambansa, had declared Ferdinand Marcos the victor in the 1986 snap elections. To pragmatic politicians, this declaration meant "tapos na ang boksing" – the game was over. The dictator, who for years had the country in the palm of his hands, must have his way.

As a long-time politician, Peping had an automatic and jaded reaction to the machinations of Marcos and to that of the doings of his rubber-stamp Batasan. As to the latest pronouncement, he had resigned himself to the idea that perhaps Marcos had won again and would now continue to reign unperturbed. But what most politicians had failed to realize was that Corazon C. Aquino had this innate and instinctive ability to sense what the people want and what the people feel.

Peping closed the door behind him and asked his sister what she had in mind. She who had pondered and mulled over the events of the past few days had a terse command. In all probability, Corazon Aquino said it only in one line, for in a matter of minutes Peping came out of the room stunned with disbelief and surrender, according to witnesses. He said: "Acheng insists on calling on the people to rally at the Luneta". To Corazon Aquino, there was no turning back. She wanted to heed the voice of the people.

People power was not born at EDSA. The seed was germinated a long time ago when a single shot that fell a man at the tarmac lit fires of protest in people's hearts. It had to take the man's widow to bring it all out.

In a few days, various citizens' organizations gathered at the Mondragon building to launch a protest movement. To everyone's amazement, except Corazon Aquino, millions came to Luneta eager to be led by this quiet and self-effacing widow. To them, she simply said, "These are my suggestions. They are now in your hands".

And how the people responded. Crony businesses and products were boycotted: banks had runs, beer sales plummeted, newspaper circulations shrank. Soon enough, the regime was reeling in astonishment and in pain. The people realized that they had the power that fateful day in Luneta.

The rest, as the cliché goes, is now history.

The people capped their protest by going to EDSA chanting Cory's name, eventually carrying her to the presidency. And for the next six years, President Aquino would tap and hone and enhance this people power until it came into its own.



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# The NGO Phenomenon

SOON AFTER EDSA, People Power had no choice but to metamorphose. For one, the people's collective will was no longer directed against a dictatorial government. The task was not to rise in protest but to work for peace. To build and not to dismantle. There was so much to be done. And had to be done as one.

With her faith solid in her people, President Aquino never wavered in her vision of a nation standing on its own. But she realized that all sectors, including the private sector, must have an active hand. She made it a policy to involve the NGOs in the planning and the decisions made by government instrumentalities, from the barangay level way up to the national level. For the next six years, NGOs would bloom throughout the country.

The Chief Executive made sure that there was a conducive environment for NGOs to proliferate and grow. The Constitution of 1987 was explicit in this. Executive Orders, laws, and subsequent programs of action reinforced the tenet of People Power.

The 1987 Constitution mandates the state "to encourage non-governmental, community-based or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation".

The Constitution also guarantees "the right of the people and their organizations to effective and reasonable participation at all levels of social, political and economic decision-making".

### **The Dark Days Gone**

During the administration of President Marcos, the government was hostile towards the NGOs. The feeling was mutual. The NGOs were also generally hostile towards the government.

This was understandable given the largely feudal character of the Marcos regime and the democratic tradition of NGOs. The hostility reached a point where government was considered the enemy because it worked against the interests of the people whom it was supposedly committed to serve. Many NGOs could not even imagine working with the government.

Marcos had sought to control all levers of power and all the resources of government. He viewed organizations that worked among the poor with extreme suspicion.

But after EDSA, the NGOs became the government's steadfast and reliable allies. They were given their due respect.

Vicky Garchitorena, an active NGO leader and advocate, shares her insights during the June 18, 1992 Parangal ng mga NGOs para kay Cory: "Immediately after EDSA, there was a flowering of the NGO movement.

First, because (President Aquino) gave us democratic space.....

Second, (her) ascendancy to the presidency on the wave of people power inspired us to use the same methods of organizing concerned citizens, no longer to topple a dictatorship but to banish hunger, and illiteracy, and malnutrition and other social ills. Many of the NGO leaders today were in the protest movement against the dictatorship. It was a natural evolution that we moved from the socio-political to the socio-economic as the needs of our country and our people changed".

Since EDSA, new and activated NGOs served as the government's alternative delivery mechanisms, facilitators for project funding and assistance, credit conduits, and project implementors.

People's organizations like farmers associations and cooperatives, labor unions and workers cooperatives, association of agrarian reform beneficiaries, organizations of upland farmers, fisherfolk, urban poor, women, youth and students were formed to address specific sectoral issues.

As a result, hundreds of organized small farmers and fishermen were transformed from mere producers to entrepreneurs. The number of cooperatives grew from 3,424 in 1986 to 15,649 by March 1992. In Bulacan alone, Governor Roberto Pagdanganan reported in June 1991 that active cooperatives rose from 52 in 1987 to 400 in 1991, with increased assets climbing from P24 million to P460 million.

### **Reaffirmation Of People's Power**

In October 1989, in a press interview with Bob Drogin, President Aquino said, "Under my administration, we have given greater importance to nongovernmental organizations. In fact, in the regional development councils, I have given 25 percent representation to nongovernmental organizations which had not been given before".

As members of the regional development councils and based on Executive Order 308 issued by President Aquino in November 1987, NGOs were urged to participate in the "formulation of long-term medium and annual socio-economic development plans", and "medium-term and annual public investments programs" at the regional and subregional levels.

The NGOs participated in appraising and prioritizing the region's socioeconomic programs. They also helped coordinate the implementation of programs and projects in the regions which involved several government agencies.

As if to emphasize the importance of NGOs in the development planning processes, the need for NGO participation was again institutionalized and enshrined in the new Local Government Code of 1991. Hailed as a landmark in people empow-



erment, the code mandates local government units to "promote the establishment and operation of people's organizations, NGOs, and the private sector in the pursuit of local autonomy".

The Code stipulates that NGO representatives be present not only in the local development council but also in other special bodies like the prequalification, bids, and awards committee; the local school board; and the local health board.

The Code is also explicit in directly involving NGOs in many key areas of development. The local Code, further, institutionalizes and enhances the so-called modes of partnerships which have been forged at the multilevels.

According to Vicky Garchitorena, those in the "NGO world are extremely excited about this law. This is a landmark legislation that no other president would have supported since it diminishes central control and devolves power to the local governments.

Only a president who truly and sincerely wished to see the emergence of an empowered citizenry and the development and strengthening of the countryside would have pushed for such a law.....this law indeed institutionalizes people power".

### **The Lifestreams**

Indeed, President Aquino not only made government-NGO partnership a way of governance. She made it a way of life. She helped made people power flow into three large lifestreams in the Philippine body politic: 1) socioeconomic development partnerships vital to reduce poverty; 2) disaster management partnerships, essential for sustaining support for the calamity-stricken; and 3) political development partnerships, critical for enhancing and preserving democratic institutions.

On hindsight, writing for an editorial for *Trait d'Union, Geneve Tiers-Monde* in June 1992, President Aquino said, "I truly believe that it is through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that we can empower the people. The NGOs are the lifestreams of people power.

When NGOs and people's organizations initiate programs and projects on their own, for the uplift of communities and seek little or no help from government then the lifestreams must be surging forth with a new patriotic consciousness with the citizenry, finding in themselves the capacity to shape the landscape of their destiny.

Indeed, in the Philippines, NGO development had become synonymous with the institutionalization of people power.

When a government forges partnerships with them to involve them in policy planning and decision-making, and, in the implementation and evaluation of programs and projects, development flows more freely into the lifestreams of the nation, transforming people's lives".

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# NGOs for Socioeconomic Development

AFTER THE FLIGHT of the dictator, President Aquino had to prepare and lead the Filipino in a larger war - the war against poverty. With 60 percent of the populace living under the poverty threshold, the urgent task at hand was to free the people from the bondage of want.

The President and her Cabinet simultaneously launched livelihood programs aimed primarily to benefit the people in the countryside. And as a matter of policy, the government was to link up with NGOs to facilitate the delivery of the basic services in any given area.

As early as June 1986, the executive made a clear statement to pursue a "people-powered development".

It said: "The private sector shall not only serve as the initiator but also as the prime mover of development. Specifically, the business sector, NGOs, and private voluntary agencies shall take the lead in undertaking and sustaining programs and projects aimed at improving the socio-economic situations".

## **Expanding Through Dialogue**

The courses of action taken by the Aquino administration was not designed within the confines of the Palace. The President and her Cabinet were guided by the



thoughts and the needs of the people. The President was relentless and tireless in meeting with the *common tao* as she travelled the breadth and width of the archipelago.

During her visit to Davao City on May 23, 1986, the President said: "Consultation is necessary because no one can know better than the people directly affected - what their problems are and how these should be solved. This is especially true when the main burden of the solutions must be borne by them".

As during the uncertain periods in 1986 when the President rallied the Filipinos to boycott crony businesses and products, the Chief Executive was always sure of one thing - the infinite capacity of the Filipino to rise above adversities and to meet challenges.

To enlarge the scope of people's participation in the planning and execution of livelihood projects in their places, the President required local and regional development councils to include NGOs as members. Rural folks also found light, voice, and importance as organized groups which the President encouraged to bloom.

### **Organizing For Livelihood Opportunities**

Barely a month after the EDSA Revolution, the government began organizing the citizens into People's Economic Councils (PECs), community-based groups composed of entrepreneurs, farmers, professionals, fishermen, teachers, housewives, market vendors, and the youth. The objective of PECs was to plan and spur economic growth and opportunities in their respective towns. Functioning as clearing houses, they were to harness resources in their locality and to utilize proper government agencies for their activities.

The exponent in government of the PECs was the Department of Trade and Industry which established the first PEC in San Fernando, Pampanga in March 1986.

Since then, till early 1991, 1,700 other PECs have been established throughout the country, initiating livelihood programs, conducting training programs on skills

and management, facilitating technology transfer, and rendering services in health, education, and social concerns. They were also involved in infrastructure projects such as farm-to-market roads, bridges, dams, and even bus terminals. Sometimes, just by monitoring works-in-progress and, sometimes, by getting involved in actual construction.

The People's Economic Councils have improved the lot of many communities in the country.

In Agusan del Sur, an economic council brought a town from a hopeless, moribund existence.

In 1985, the people of the once bustling Magallanes town despaired over the closure of the Sta. Ines Plywood Factory - the town's largest employer. The company was the community's lifeblood, and its closure reduced the town's economic activities by at least 50 percent. As a result, the people's fall back position, the Sta. Ines Cooperative, exhausted its reserves. The town's rural bank could not help. It, too, was in the brink of collapse due to the absence of economic activity.

But the people of Sta. Ines was a hardy lot. They thought of embarking on income-generating projects through their cooperative. They sought fund assistance from the Ministry of Trade and Industry and some Canadian organizations operating in the province. Unfortunately, their requests were turned down for "lack of equity".

"Walang naitulong ang gobyerno sa amin noon (before EDSA) (*Government has never helped us before*)", said a leader of the cooperative. Then came President Aquino.

On March 30, 1987, a People's Economic Council was formed in Magallanes. It facilitated valuable financing assistance to the Sta. Ines Credit Cooperative and other livelihood undertakings in the area. The town sprang back to life.

The council negotiated loans from DTI for the Sta. Ines Credit Cooperative. In 1988, the loan extended was P150,000.00. In 1989, it became P500,000.00. In

1990, the amount was further increased to P1.2 million. The funds came from DTI's Tulong sa Tao-Self Employment and Livelihood Assistance (TST-SELA) programs.

The funds were used to conduct skills training in garments, meat and fish processing, small business management and leadership training. By early 1990, some P1.4 million have been loaned out to 198 small micro-enterprises borrowers.

The PEC in Magallanes also spearheaded the development and production of small fishpond farms. It facilitated a P299,500.00 loan from the Landbank of the Philippines for small cultivators of prawn and bangus.

More blessings followed. As the national economy picked up under President Aquino, the Sta. Ines Plywood Factory was reopened. This created 1,000 jobs and increased the buying power of the residents. By then, the people of Magallanes knew that they could not afford to overlook their cooperative.

In what a study termed as a "highly participative" manner, the townfolk pursued to improve their knowledge in cooperatives. They conducted seminars and training programs to enhance access to funds, improve project management, upgrade skills, establish credit consciousness, and increase awareness in cooperativism, consumerism, and community development.

The impact made by the People's Economic Council in Magallanes had been replicated more than 10 times over in other rural communities. Some outstanding PEC projects were the basket production village in Kalookan City; handicrafts industry development in Nabas, Aklan; bagsakan project in Aritao, Nueva Vizcaya; electrification project in Victorias, Negros Occidental; Yuta Uli sa Tawo project in Mabuhay, Zamboanga del Sur; People's earth-filled dams in Gattaran, Cagayan; and construction of foot bridges in Pata, Sulu.

Victoria Garchitorena, national chairperson of the People's Economic Council, says: "This is the true economic revolution of today. In the furthest municipalities of the land, there are Filipinos who, quietly and without fanfare, are changing the society they live in by acting as catalysts for economic growth, as one voice in the



articulation of the community's concerns, and a local ombudsman to ensure the faithful delivery of services".

And without fanfare, too, President Aquino directed government agencies and financial institutions to come to the aid of the small farmers and fishermen.

### Counsel For The Farmers' Councils

One such directive was contained in Executive Order No. 116 which authorized the Department of Agriculture to organize farmers, fisherfolk, rural bankers, traders, and other individuals engaged in agriculture to constitute themselves into Agriculture and Fishery Councils or AFCs. Like the PECs, these groups served as fora for livelihood ideas.

The AFCs also coordinated the Livelihood Enhancement for Agriculture Development (LEAD) program of the Department of Agriculture. The LEAD program was designed to encourage farmer entrepreneurship by providing capital and technological support to rural folks who wished to control their produce from planting to marketing.

Local councils were given the responsibility of receiving, evaluating, and endorsing project proposals from their *kababayans* for possible LEAD funding. Funding were either in the form of loans from banks or in grants usually from a foreign NGO. Any project proposal to proceed needed imprimatur from an AFC.

In cases wherein the needed funding was P150,000.00 or below, the council also served as the approving authority. Projects which cost more were sent to a higher body, the National Agricultural and Fishery Council.

Since its launching, LEAD had set on stream over 3,489 livelihood and support service projects.

The process of decision-making was one way in which empowerment, through the Department of Agriculture, was carried through. Like PECs, the AFCs became genuine grassroots endeavor.

President Aquino emphasized the active participation of NGOs in program management. She advocated an end to the traditional top-down approach in development. Time and again, she said: "The role of the NGOs must not be limited to being beneficiaries of projects alone. They must be initiators and implementors of the development process".

The NGOs were also given other roles in facilitating assistance to end beneficiaries. In concrete terms, they were urged to help farmers and fishermen do feasibility studies when they made their proposals from funding. This was what was called as the "handholding" process, where the elder, the *kuya*, took care of the younger ones, the *bunsos* in their growth. The NGOs were asked to guide and assist the smaller or new groups in project identification.

The NGOs also served as alternate delivery mechanisms, not only as facilitators for project funding and assistance but also as credit conduits, project monitors, and most of all, as organizers of people's organizations.

This unprecedented emphasis on the active role of the NGOs produced spectacular results. But as in anything new, it had its concomitant awkward, but nevertheless happy adjustment periods. As what happened in Bataan.

### Old Problems, New Roles

For years, water for irrigation was the main problem of the rice farmers in Pilar, Bataan. Their main source of water was the old Magsaysay dam which, aside from groaning with age, had been damaged by strong typhoons. Farmers had to continually stack sacks of sand on the dam wall to prevent it from collapsing altogether.

The Tabon ng Bayan, a farmers' group led by Rolando "Mang Lando" Sanchez, appealed to their political leaders and to government agencies concerned to rehabilitate the dam. The National Irrigation Administration did technical plans for its rehabilitation, but the farmers would not agree to any of them.



The NIA proposed that the dam be first emptied before it could be patched up. The timetable was four years. To the farmers, that was unthinkable.

The farmers preferred that the rehabilitation be done at the quickest time possible. Furthermore, they opposed the idea of emptying the dam. It would mean lost harvests. It would mean loss of millions of pesos. It would mean hungry families.

The farmers reached over to their chestful of wisdom and experience and proposed, instead, to build diversion canals to maximize the use of water.

The NIA could not agree because it would have entailed higher rehabilitation cost and a longer timetable. Besides, the canals had to pass a private land. That meant problems in right-of-way.

There was an impasse. During the visit of President Aquino in Bataan on August 12, 1989, she learned of the problem and promptly instructed concerned parties to sit down and resolve the deadlock.

On August 31, 1989, people from the Office of the President, NIA officials, and local officials went to Pilar, Bataan, in two waves - one in the early morning, and one near noontime.

The first wave was the Radio-Television Malacanang (RTVM) crew headed by its executive director, Maria Montelibano. They were tasked to document the condition of the dam and the discussion between the farmers and the officials. Based on a previous arrangement, the preliminary meeting was to be at 6 o'clock in the morning.

Used to a very punctual President Aquino, the RTVM crew left Manila at two o'clock in the morning to be on time. They were at the dam site minutes before the appointed time. But there was no Mang Lando. There was nobody from the farmers group.

Montelibano, who is energy personified, and her crew waited for 30 minutes. One hour. Two hours. At eight o'clock a.m., Mang Lando came, almost stunned.

With embarrassment, he said that he did not really expect people from the Office of the President to come.

Many times in the past, Lando confessed, the farmers were lucky if government officials and workers who promised to come would show up on time. Most of the time, he said, they simply did not show up.

The second wave of officials came on time, too. They patiently sat down with Mang Lando and his group until they were able to come up with a solution. Foremost consideration was to prevent the loss of any cropping season.

They decided to build canals, with the farmers tasked to get the permission of the owners of affected adjacent property. The farmers, too, provided labor. They were consulted on the final project design. And they were actively involved in the buying of cement and other construction materials.

By June 1991, or in less than two years, the dam's rehabilitation was completed. Soon enough, the farmers' harvest doubled. The farmers' faith in their own capacity, and trust in government were renewed.

Mang Lando sums it up: "Ngayon lang namin nadarama na kaming maliliit ay pinakinggan at pinahalagahan". (*For the first time in our lives, we are finally heard and given importance*).

### Unwavering Trust In The People

The heart of the President exuded it all: Trust is an important element in people empowerment. President Aquino's trust and faith in the Filipino people put an end to ceremonial collaboration, token consultation, and dole-out mentality in extending government funds and resources to the people.

The President trusted the Filipino to use his better judgement. She trusted him in determining his own future. And she trusted him with huge funds. On the basis of trust, the bond grew.

President Aquino entrusted P1.2 billion worth of assistance from her President's Social Fund to 344 NGO partners. The Department of Agriculture's livelihood program released P416.59 million pesos for various micro-projects in the rural areas.

Tulong sa Tao of DTI released a total of P176.7 million to 272 conduit NGOs to finance micro-livelihood projects.

In addition, the Landbank of the Philippines from 1986 to 1991, extended loans amounting to P4.87 billion to over 6,360 farmers cooperatives benefiting almost half a million members. The remarkable development about this huge loans is that they were being paid - defying the socioeconomic pundits who have said that small farmers and fishermen were "non-bankable".

During the June 1, 1990 regional dialogue on poverty alleviation, President Aquino explained what she meant by people's total war against poverty. She said: "In the ultimate analysis, it is our people themselves who must provide the all-important resource to win the war against poverty.

Deliberately, I veered away from the image of government as an almighty institution designed to be the people's redeemer, a relationship which relegated our people to the role of passive expectators in an opera called national development.

I opted, instead, for the concept of strong partnership between people and government, where government provides the encouragement and initial resources which the people in turn, harness, multiply and use to improve their individual and collective lives".

At one time, the President stressed: "I try to empower the people more so that they themselves will build their self-reliance, initially getting government assistance but at a certain point, hopefully being able to do it on their own".

In addition to DTI's Tulong sa Tao Program, DA's LEAD projects, and Landbank's Push for Cooperatives development, the government's direct assistance to the rural folk included the Department of Agrarian Reform's Agro-Industrial



Development Area program, the Technology Livelihood Resource Center's Support for Foundations and Integrated People's Cooperative System, and the Social Security System's Members Assistance for the Development of Entrepreneurship.

There were also the Community Forestry Program for the livelihood of upland farmers and the Community Mortgage Program for socialized housing. President Aquino initiated the President's Social Fund (PSF) to assist livelihood programs and many more.

These programs required the people to organize into groups to be able to avail themselves of government assistance. The bias was for people power solutions. They discouraged individualistic approach and instead focused on forging alliances and in the pooling of resources. These eventually formed the backbone of the *Kabisig* movement.

### Dawning Of Cooperatives

Under the leadership of President Aquino, cooperatives in the country grew in number and importance. This was no accident. There were conscious, deliberate, and concerted efforts to develop a strong and extensive cooperatives system.

President Aquino said in February 1990: "I see cooperativism as a democratic response. Cooperatives provide our people - even the poor in the countryside - with an experience in participatory decision-making.

Cooperatives have therefore become a vehicle for grassroots democracy; people sharing in the responsibility and accountability".

President Aquino's desire to support cooperativism made no false claim to originality. The first Philippine cooperative was, in fact, founded by Dr. Jose Rizal at the turn of the century when he was in exile in Dapitan. Based on a German model, the cooperative that Rizal established sought to improve the livelihood capability of the town's people.

Since 1915, various laws had been enacted, creating rural financing structures, promoting and regulating cooperatives and providing support systems for their growth. But the considerable gains of cooperativism's formative years were wiped out by the imposition of martial law. In many instances, cooperatives were equated with subversive groups. The Visayan Integrated Cooperatives, or VICTO, one of the biggest federation of coops in Cebu, had to drop the word cooperative from its name during martial law just to avoid undue harassments.

But Corazon Aquino was a different president. She had no fear, much less, fear of people organizing into groups. In the Constitution of 1987, the growth of cooperatives was to serve as an instrument of social justice and economic development.

On March 10, 1990, the President signed the Cooperative Act which put more bones and muscles into cooperatives in the Philippines. The act also led to the birth of a thousand and one cooperatives. In 1991, 8,932 cooperatives registered with the Cooperative Development Authority an almost 500 percent increase over the number of coops in 1990. In 1985, only 226 coops were registered with CDA.

### **Celebrating Cooperatives**

In Talongadian, Iloilo City, the spirit of cooperation among the youth made possible the economic and physical transformation of the area.

Organized by young men Cesar Sumague and Ismael Umadhay in 1987, the Talongadian Multi-purpose Cooperative, Inc. had at the start 33 members and assets worth P34,379. At the end of 1990, it had close to half a million for farmer members.

President Aquino paid tribute to the youth of Talongadian during the launching of the national partnership for cooperative development on February 5, 1990. She said: "I was particularly touched by the story of a cooperative in Talongadian, a sitio in the outskirts of Iloilo City.

The place was an isolated monument to poverty. Not even a dirt road connected it to the main thoroughfare. Its residents were complacent, apparently re-





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President Aquino presides over an informal meeting with farmers and fishermen from Southern Luzon during a visit to the Liceo de San Pablo, in San Pablo, Laguna on August 8, 1991. With the President are: (clockwise) Celso Daniorco, vice president of the SPCMBY Cooperative; Marino Escaris, president of Dayap Credit Cooperatives and Development, Inc.; Press Secretary Tomas Gomez III; Roger Magyaya, president of the Katipunan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka; Manolo Suntuangco, president of the Federation of Laguna Farmers Marketing Cooperative, Inc.; Nelia Fortuna, president of the Pitogo Coconut Farmers Federation; Agriculture Secretary Senen Bacani; Laguna Governor Felicisimo San Luis; Antonio Austria, president of the Alyansa ng mga Samahan sa Timog Katagalugan Para sa Kaunlaran; Paz Yuson, president of the Alaminos Barangay Multi-purpose Cooperative, Inc.; and Agrarian Reform Undersecretary Renato Padilla.

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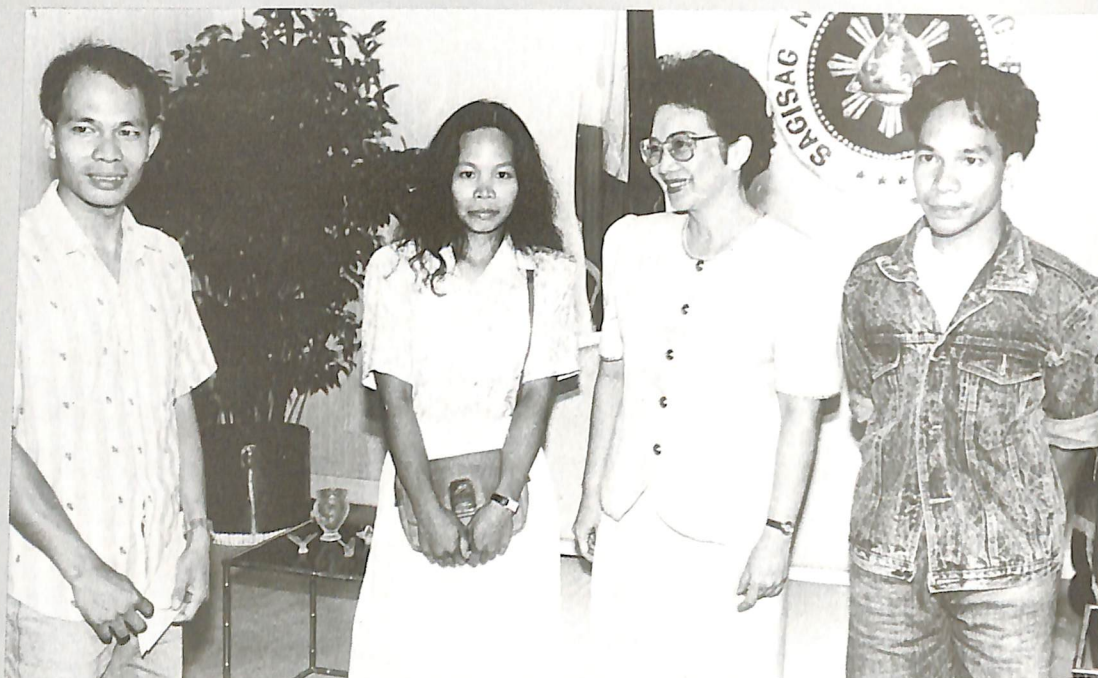
The President waves to the people during the launching of Kabisig at the EDSA Shrine.





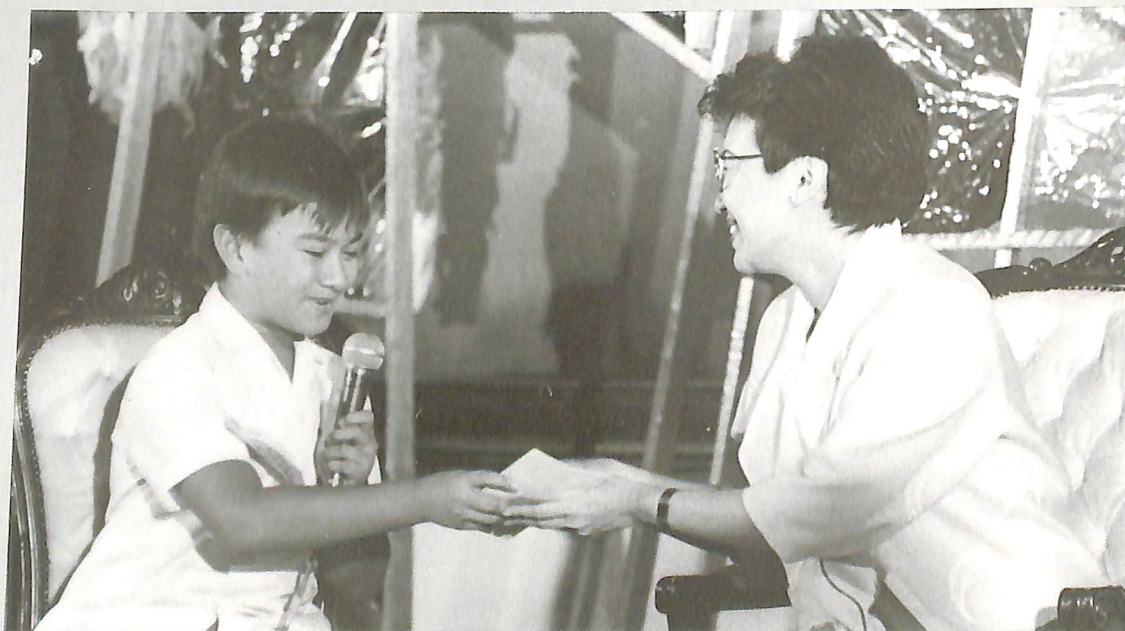
President Aquino admires the hand-woven birthday gift presented to her by peasant leaders during a visit to Naga City on January 21, 1992. Holding up the handwoven cotton tapestry are Florendo Gregorio (left) and Flaviano Encenares, vice-chairman and chairman respectively of the Tunay na Alyansa ng mga Samahan sa Kabikulan. The tapestry was hand-made by Fe Ibarlen of the Buhi Rural Women Multi-Purpose Cooperative.





**NEVER A LITTLE.** Above, President Aquino poses with Demetria Munda, a Filipina domestic helper based in Singapore who donated P7,000 out of her savings for the victims of Mt. Pinatubo. Also in photo are Bong Munda (left) and Leo Munda (right) who accompanied their sister to Malacañang. The Mundas are from Sta. Lucia, San Fernando, Pampanga.

Below, President Corazon C. Aquino receives a P300.00 donation from Arlu Gomez, a 6th grader of Xavier School, out of his first salary as a junior newscaster of Channel 9's Newswatch for the "Bigay Puso Pasko '86" project.







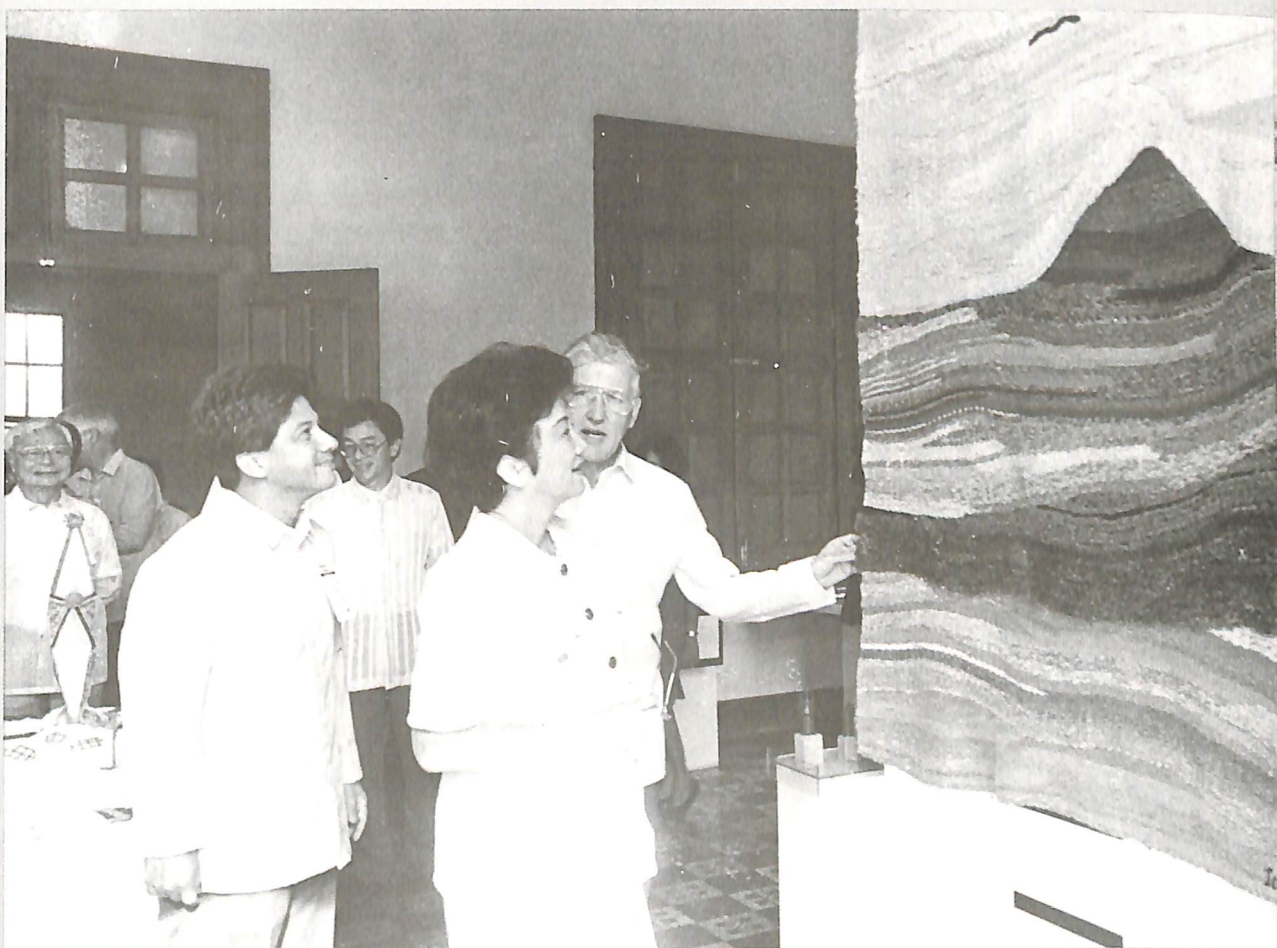
The President was the guest of honor during the awarding ceremonies for outstanding Pampanguenos organized by the "Bangun Pampanga Movement" on March 19, 1992. The group was organized in response to the crisis in Pampanga wrought by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo.





President Aquino admires the "Earth Flag" presented to her on June 27, 1991 by Sister Luz Emmanuel Soriano (far right) on behalf of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – environmentalists during the celebration of the Philippine Environment Month at PICC. The President urged the citizenry to help preserve the ecological balance in the country. Also in photo is Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Fulgencio Factoran Jr.





President Aquino admires a hand-woven rug depicting Mt. Pinatubo at the Negros Canadian Center in Bacolod on November 22, 1991. The Center is a result of the Canadian government's C\$11 million grant to the province and its non-governmental groups' livelihood programs. With Mrs. Aquino are Gov. Bitay Lacson, Canadian Ambassador Andre Simard, Eduardo Locsin of the Negros Rehabilitation and Development Fund and Vice Gov. Rafael Coscolluela.





**President Aquino is greeted by enthusiastic Davaoeños on February 20, 1992 during her visit in their city to inaugurate a Housing Project and distribute livelihood funds to several non-governmental cooperatives.**





President Aquino is welcomed by members of the International Volunteers group upon her arrival at the Main Conference Room in Malacañang during the celebration of International Volunteers Day on November 28, 1991. The President lauded local and foreign volunteers for their "heroic" assistance to Filipinos, especially during natural calamities. With the President is Virginia Davide, director of the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency.

President Aquino views the provincial network of the Daughters of Charity (DC) congregation during her visit to the St. Peregrine Development Center in Parañaque on the occasion of its foundress' 400th birthday on August 12, 1991. At present, the congregation has established 23 schools all over the country with a total of 41,164 students. With the President are some members of the DC congregation led by Assistant Sister Visitatrix Margarita Duran (second from left). The President earlier announced the release of some P1.35 million to finance charitable projects of the congregation.







**TO THE PEOPLE.** The regional consultation held in Bacolod City on October 16, 1986 was well attended by a crowd of Negrenses who caught their first glimpse of President Aquino in her first official visit to their region.



signed to their meager earnings, and poor quality of life. That was until one day, a group of out-of-school youth decided to set up a cooperative.

I am moreover particularly pleased with the leadership opportunity the cooperative gave to the young people of Talongadian. They used to stand idly by. Now they lead in bringing progress to their community. To top it all, these youngsters now undertake credit transactions with one of our major government lending institutions. Today, they have more money. But more important than that, they have regained their dignity and their rightful place as our comrades-in-arms in the national war against poverty. In their homefront, they are already victors".

The cooperative embarked on corn, mungbean, and swine production. It built a small warehouse and a coop store.

Today, a 350-meter long barangay road winds fown from the municipal road of Sta. Barbara to the far end of Talongadian. Twenty six families in the sitio joined hands the *kabisig* way and built the road themselves in 14 days.

Ismael Umadhay recalls: "Since time immemorial, wala iyang road na iyan. But when we organized, that was one of the first things we did".

The short road literally placed Talongadian on the map. It made possible the visit of local elected leaders who, for years, hardly knew that the sitio existed.

There were many such projects all over the country which, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, do not mean much separately. But when fitted together, they depict the increasing dynamism of the rural economy.

In Bulacan, five poultry cooperatives banded together to improve their operations and profitability. The result was synergy. Their federation had since been called the Agro-Food Processing Development Corporation.

It brought together 8,000 backyard poultry raisers who belong to the Agro-Filipino Inc.; Bulacan Livestock and Poultry Raisers Association, Inc.; Bulacan Growers' Cooperative; Katipunang Yaman ng Samahan ng mga Tangkilikang Magsasaka

sa Bulakan; and Pandi Livestock and Poultry Marketing/Pandi Poultry Breeding Farm, Inc.

It all seemed a pipe dream when Dr. Pilar de Ocampo brought to the President's attention during the President's visit to Bulacan on January 25, 1989, their proposal for a dressing plant.

President Aquino right then and there endorsed the proposal to the Department of Agriculture. The Department, in turn, assisted Dra. Ocampo and her group to conceptualize and lay the groundworks for the project. It commissioned the Urban Food Foundation, Inc. to prepare the project's feasibility study and undertake financial packaging.

On September 13, 1990, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed between the Chicken Growers Federation, the DA, Urban Food Foundation, Inc., and the United Coconut Planters Bank (UCPB) as the lending institution.

A total of P32 million business capital was raised from the pooling of resources. DA-LEAD gave a P5 million grant. The United Coconut Planters Bank extended P10 million loan. But the bulk of the business capital, P12 million, came from the pooled resources of the five cooperatives and its 8,000 members.

In February 1992, the Federation's state-of-the-art chicken dressing plant on a four-hectare lot in Balagtas, Bulacan was inaugurated. No less than President Aquino cut the ribbon.

The plant boasted of processing 1,000 birds per hour. It assured backyard chicken growers of ready steady market. And it effectively shut off middlemen and raised the incomes of cooperative members.

President Aquino expressed elation over the plant's operation. The President urged them, too, to challenge big poultry business in the country.

### **Small Cooperatives As Raison d' Etre**

Big groups as well as small groups benefited from the pro-poor thrust of the government. Landbank, true to its mandate, anchored its agricultural lending program on small farmers and fishermen.

In 1987, Landbank shifted to a cooperative lending strategy. Since then, Landbank had paved the way for increased number of cooperatives assisted from 20 in 1987 to 6,360 in 1991.

Prior to 1987, Landbank gave production loans strictly to the rice and corn agrarian reform beneficiaries. It granted loans to about 10,000 farmers as individuals, rather than as members of cooperatives. Sadly, due perhaps to the patronage system being inculcated then, the farmers perceived the loans as dole-outs. As a result, practically nobody paid back. That led to the collapse of the much-touted Masagana 99 Rice Program. Later, too, that of the Kilusang Kabuhayan para sa Kaunlaran.

When Landbank, as well as other agencies in the Aquino administration, shifted its strategy to wholesale lending, the reach of the benefits became much more extensive. Landbank alone was able to directly help almost half a million farmers from 1987 to 1991.

Landbank President Deogracias N. Vistan says that lending to cooperatives rather than to individuals made quite a difference "like night and day". He reports that the repayment rates rose to no less than 96 percent.

The formation of cooperatives led to peer pressure. Says Vistan: "Our people are very conscious of a sense of being a part of a social unit. In this case, the cooperative of their own community. Once they fail in their obligations, they are ostracized. No Filipino can bear that".

In 1991, Landbank assisted cooperatives in 14,701 rural barangays or 41 percent of the total barangays in the countryside or to 1,339 rural municipalities or 85 percent of all possible municipalities in the rural areas nationwide.

Vistan adds: "The President emphasized very clearly that she wanted to leave a very strong mark in terms of a package of benefits to what she referred to as the bottom 30 percent of our population. To the extent that we have started to make life viable for a portion of that 30 percent, then we attribute that to the President when she enunciated that particular mandate".



## Changing Lives

One of the most publicized beneficiaries of the combined efforts of Landbank and the other departments is the Tarlac Integrated Livelihood Cooperative (TILCO) of Bernabe Buscayno or Kumander Dante, the former leader of the dreaded New People's Army - the armed group of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

President Aquino released Ka Dante, together with the CPP founder Jose Ma. Sison and hundreds of other political detainees in 1986. While Sison chose to oppose the government, Buscayno opted to try his hands in farming.

In 1988, he established a people's livelihood foundation which later became TILCO after personal consultation with the President, local officials of Tarlac, the late Don Chino Roces, DAR Secretary Phillip Juico, and TLRC's Sylvia Ordenez.

The project utilized an integrated approach to production with the rice industry as centerpiece project - from planting to processing to marketing. The approach included financing, technical and training assistance, and values education.

A year after its launching in 1988, the project was hailed a success.

Ka Dante says, "Talagang iniisip ko na tumulong sa ating bagong presidente (President Aquino). Palagay ko ay bibigyang pansin ng mga nasa bundok ang attitude na pinakita ng ating Presidente. Itong kooperatiba na naglalayong pagbutihin iyong kanilang kalagayang pangkabuhayan at magkaroon ng pangsosyal ng pag-unlad, malaki ang maitulong nito upang hindi makaisip or hindi magkaroon ng insurgency sa lugar *(I have decided to help the new president. Those still in the hills will find the President's thrust refreshing. This thrust of encouraging cooperatives will make a difference in their lives and hopefully will discourage the propagation of insurgency)*".

For its main beneficiaries, the farmers, the cooperative meant access to low credit, seed production center, organic fertilizer laboratory, farm equipment pool, repair shop, facilities for postharvest (rice mills, solar and mechanical dryers, warehouse) and gains trading center.



It also meant improved production to 150 cavan per hectare, three times their original yield. And finally, it meant the start of their emancipation from indebtedness and want.

By 1991, Dante said, "Makita mo iyan sa kanilang pamumuhay ngayon kung ikumpara two years ago. Nakita mo pa iyong bahay medyo gumanda. Halos bato na nga iyong mga bahay dito. Pagkatapos marami na silang gamit sa bahay ngayon, may bisikleta sila. Iyong iba nagmamadali. Imbes ng bumili ng bomba ng tubig, bumili ng colored tv. *(You can already see an improvement in their lives - renovated houses, new appliances, bicycles. The others are impatient. Instead of buying water pumps, they bought colored tv instead)*".

And what did Dante feel about these changes?

"Noon mas maraming panahon ko sa pagtatago kaysa doon sa involvement ko sa productive undertaking. Ngayon, halos araw-araw hanggang gabi, kahit holiday, nandiyan kami sa mga trabaho namin. Masayang-masaya ako at gustong-gusto ko itong trabaho ko. Kasi may bunga kaagad *(Before, most of my time was spent hiding. Today, almost daily, even after dusk, even if it is a holiday, we work. I am very happy and I love my work because I feel the benefits immediately)*". Indeed, fruitation did come.

Repayment rate was 100 percent. As the farmer members kept up with loan payments, the cooperative's earnings were plowed into other livelihood projects: Tilapia fishpond, duck farm, cattle raising, 30-hectare nursery, seed production, hollow-block making, multi-cropping that included corn, asparagus, and green soya and okra for exports to Japan and other countries.

By 1991, the cooperative's assets reached P35 million including threshers, trucks, bulldozers, and an irrigation system. Membership rose from 506 to 15,000 farmers tilling more than 10,352 hectares of land in Tarlac alone.

As Dante says with pride: "Sa fishpond amoy isda. Magpunta ka sa itikan, amoy itik. Magpunta ka sa bakahan, amoy baka. Magpunta ka sa bukid, amoy palay, amoy gulay. Iyan ang amoy ng buhay. Diyan nabubuhay ang mga tao sa amoy na iyan".

## Replication Of Success

Ka Dante inspired many people. Julio Junio came to Manila for a vacation in November 1989 and saw Ka Dante on television being applauded for his successful cooperative. To himself, he swore that he could do that too. When he returned to his hometown in Wao, Lanao del Norte, he broached the idea of setting up a cooperative with his barrio folks. They thought he was just too drunk.

Julio's neighbors in Wao were suffused with machismo. They were, after all, Batanguenos. Yes, Batanguenos who migrated to Lanao during the term of President Magsaysay looking for better opportunities. Mindanao, then, was being promoted as the Land of Promise.

But Wao did not turn out to be paradise. In fact, it was isolated from the world. Mayor Guieb of Wao says: "Our roads were impassable. No vehicle could reach us".

The Batangueno farmers were in a worst situation. Their barrio, Sta. Clara, had no access road to speak of. Like many other rural folks who have steeled themselves against unceasing despair, they only had deaf ears for ideas like cooperatives. They would rather sing over glasses of 'stainless' (gin) to while their worries away.

But then, as if by miracle, farm-to-market roads were built in Wao by the Aquino government. Junio pushed for the cooperative. As stories of success about coops in other remote areas filtered in, his *barkada* became more receptive.

So, the Sta. Clara Multi-Purpose Cooperative was born. Together with half-a-dozen other coops in Wao. Junio's group approached Landbank for a P2 million loan to help them, primarily, in their venture to produce corn. The Sta. Clara farmers were a hard-working group. They planted coffee beans, black pepper, soya beans, rootcrops, and rice. They wanted to expand.

In less than two years, for demonstrating remarkable productivity, the Sta. Clara was one of the 10 model cooperatives cited by Landbank. Junio returned to

Manila on November 1991 to receive his group's plaque from President Aquino herself. He went to the Palace understandably tipsy with happiness and pride.

### Mirror Images

Ka Dante also inspired a young priest, Fr. Rene Mangahas of Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, to replicate an integrated rice industry project in his parish. Fr. Mangahas led Alay Tangkilik Foundation to expand its program of free church services agro-industrial livelihood program.

In April 26, 1990, Fr. Mangahas joined Ka Dante, some governors, and NGO and farmer leaders in a *kapihan/pulong-pulong* held immediately after President Aquino inaugurated the huge warehouse and postharvest facilities of Ka Dante and his group.

Inspired, the young priest shared to the forum his own experience of working with the Aquino government when his parish started livelihood projects in Cabiao. "The administration did not look at political or partisan leanings; it looked at what the people really needed".

The unqualified support given by government agencies to Alay Tangkilik has resulted in the construction of its own postharvest facilities which included a huge warehouse, a mechanical dryer, a rice mill, a standby generator, and delivery trucks.

Farmer members rose from 196 to 1,000. Incomes improved as they became free from usurers, middlemen, traders, and suppliers. They devised a saving scheme wherein age-old usury debts were reduced and a 'rainy-day' fund was started. Members were required to deposit with the coop two to five cavans of rice after every harvest. These, in turn, were given equivalent peso value based on prevailing market rates. This savings, now called provident fund, are now used for production loans, education loans, emergency loans, and death benefits.

But more than these manifestations of success, Fr. Mangahas points to the strong community spirit, the camaraderie, and the liberating sense of self-reliance that now propel the people of Cabiao and its neighboring towns.

Patricia Sison of the Evelio Javier Foundation sums up the feeling of the hundreds of Julio Junios and Fr. Mangahases encouraged by President Aquino: "The NGO phenomenon . . . has succeeded in bringing about qualitative change in the psyche of the Filipino".



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# NGOs for Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation

THE PARTNERSHIP OF the government and the NGO in times of calamities and disasters is probably the oldest form of alliance between the two sectors. This is also true in times of war.

Traditionally and in times of calamities, civic groups like the Red Cross and the Girl and Boy Scout Movement respond automatically to provide relief services and assistance.

The killer quake of 1990 and the Mt. Pinatubo eruption in 1991, were unprecedented and of such magnitude that the relief, rehabilitation work, and rebuilding from the ruins were just too big for the cash-strapped government to handle. It was this twin destruction which tested the government-NGO alliance to the hilt.

Aid from foreign shores came. And the Aquino administration rose to the occasion and handled emergency situation excellently. But most of the heroic efforts, as the President had repeatedly acknowledged, came from the private sector.

## **Helping Hands**

Alay sa Kapus-Palad Foundation, Inc. or AKAP, was formed in Baguio City, four days after the killer quake devastated Baguio and the neighboring provinces. It was organized by members of 10 religious congregations.

AKAP went around Baguio City and nearby areas to solicit food, clothing, and medicine and distributed these to the earthquake victims. AKAP, however, did not stop at rendering relief services. They later provided rehabilitation, housing, health and nutrition, educational assistance, and livelihood development assistance to the people affected by the killer quake.

In Benguet, the main source of livelihood of the people was vegetable farming and their produce were sold in key population centers in Luzon including Metro Manila. The earthquake, however, destroyed their communal irrigation system, vegetable storage sheds, and farm-to-market trails/service roads. The calamity effectively halted their production.

AKAP plodded on and spearheaded the implementation of the Upland Farm Systems Reconstruction project. The project was to benefit more than 2,000 farmer families, predominantly Ibalois and Kankana-eyes in eight barangays in the towns of Itogon, La Trinidad, and Tuba.

The farmers and AKAP joined hands to set up 36 communal irrigation systems, build two units of water tanks, repair a 56 cubic meter storage sheds in each of the eight barangays, and rehabilitated 27 sections of communal foot trails and 16 footbridges.

Initial funding came from donations. But the bulk came from a P4.2 million grant from the Office of the President and the Presidential Management Staff-Integrated Livelihood Rehabilitation Program for Earthquake Victims.

AKAP was also the PMS-NGO partner for the restoration project in Kabayan, Benguet. It was entrusted with a P3.1 million grant to implement the project.

Kabayan is made up of 13 barangays populated by about 1,700 small farmers households. The people's main livelihood activity is upland farming of rice and vegetables. Prior to the earthquake, over 42,000 tons of rice and assorted vegetables were produced annually in their centuries-old rice terraces. Productive activities were paralyzed when the earthquake damaged most of the foot trails, footbridges, and communal irrigation systems.

Once again, AKAP and the people chalked up feats of socioeconomic wonders: together they repaired and modified nine communal irrigation systems consisting of a total length of 12,400 meter canals and repaired pipe, restored nine sections of communal foot trails 30 kilometers long, and reconstructed 14 foot-bridges.

The partnership with AKAP exemplified the collaborative approach adapted by the Aquino government in postrelief work.

Donations amounting to P320.4 million which were received by the PMS, and P40 million from the President's Social Fund were entrusted to NGOs and POs to implement livelihood, small infrastructure, psycho-social workshops-seminars, NGO capability building, housing and food/cash for work for victims of the earthquake, the Mt. Pinatubo eruption, typhoon Uring and the red tide.

The NGOs also pooled resources and formed the Corporate Network for Disaster Response (CNDR) in the aftermath of the July 1990 killer quake.

### **Big Job, Big Response**

Right after the Pinatubo disaster, the government convened 200 people representing GOs and NGOs at the Asian Institute of Management in Makati to draw up action plans to address the problems of the people affected by the eruption.

The task force invited NGO representatives Jaime A. Cura of the Coalition for Transparency, Triccie Sison of the Muntinlupa Development Foundation, Joe Alejandrino, and Marietta Goco in the brainstorming and in the hands-on work.

Soon enough, NGOs including the CNDR, which showed its mettle in speedy mobilization and expertise in relief and rehabilitation during the earthquake, formed a larger umbrella organization known as ANDAR, the NGO Network for Disaster Resettlement and Rehabilitation as the private sector's response to government efforts.

ANDAR counted for its members, representatives from Katipunan, Evelio javier Foundation, Mercy Corps, Federation of Free Workers, FEED, PINOI, Medical Am-



bassadors, Muntinlupa Development Foundation, Nueva Ecija NGO Forum, UP-PGH Psychiatrist Foundation, ABS-CBN Foundation, Philippine Association for Intercultural Development, World Vision, and many others.

In October 1991, ANDAR inked a Memorandum of Agreement with the Presidential Task Force to enhance GO-NGO collaboration specially in information sharing, monitoring, and in the implementation of the task force programs. ANDAR was to act as conduit for government financial services and resources.

### **Into The Soul Of Rehabilitation**

The magnitude of disasters did not only mean infrastructure and economic loss, but it also took its toll in the human capacity in coping with their loss. Particularly affected were the children who suddenly dreaded living day after day. It was in human rehabilitation wherein NGOs also helped a lot.

Psychiatrists and professionals of the UP-PGH Psychiatrists Foundation were at the forefront of psychological interventions. Beyond extending medical relief, they also designed psychological and therapy programs. They conducted trainor's training workshops for volunteers, students, and faculty of Behavioral Sciences and related disciplines to equip them with skills in crisis intervention.

Learning from the lessons of earthquakes and typhoons, NGOs also got involved in early warning systems.

When the flood warning system was introduced, the local farmers and irrigation associations were part of the system which helped disseminate the information on water levels. They also initiated evacuation efforts to relocation sites when necessary.

What was remarkable about the rehabilitation work was that NGOs who were victims themselves were able to shake off initial shock and joined in the *damayan*.

Ka Dante's TILCO was greatly affected by the Mt. Pinatubo eruption. Ashfall devastated large portions of its farms, thereby causing some of the coop's farmers to put off payments. Yet, TILCO selflessly aided displaced Aetas.

TILCO helped build the resettlement in Barrio Kalangitan in Capas, Tarlac. Here, they led residents of Kalangitan in turning 70 hectares into a plantation for sugar, cassava, and even bamboo.

Times of adversity heighten the Filipinos'sense of *bayanihan*. At such moments,they are models of a proud nation. EDSA was a shining example. The recent disasters revealed that the Filipino's sense of brotherhood could be harnessed in an organized manner. The larger role and bigger number of NGOs made this possible. Rehabilitation was quick. Epidemic was prevented from breaking out. Panic was quickly contained.

The President personally visited calamity areas to see that work was being done. To her elation, her faith was confirmed: Filipinos are able.

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# NGOs As Political Partners

PRESIDENT AQUINO WAS never a member of a political party. Although she ran under Vice-President Salvador Laurel's UNIDO Party, she adamantly refused to be affiliated with it. She also resisted tremendous pressure to join the so-called administration party, the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino or LDP.

Her refusal to join any political party stemmed not from her abhorrence of traditional politicians rather, it stemmed from her infinite faith in her people. The President always worked on the positivistic rationale.

It was the people, after all, who formed the true base of her mandate. From the protest movement after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino in 1983 until the Snap Elections of 1986, it was the people, and not any political party, who carried the brunt of the fight against dictatorship.

The August Twenty One Movement. The Justice for Aquino, Justice for All. The Cory Aquino for President Movement. Doctors for Cory. Lawyers for Cory. United Concerned Christians. Muslims for Cory. And many other groups of different shapes, sizes, and colors. Quick and flexible, they sprouted everywhere and swarmed all over the monolith Kilusang Bagong Lipunan like deadly ants.



When Marcos declared curfew during the height of the EDSA Revolution and threatened to arrest all violators, the truth was: There was nothing he could do anymore. The people have discovered their power.

President Aquino was borne into office on the shoulders of the people, and this favor she returned a millionfold.

### **Beyond Elections**

Before EDSA, the concept of people empowerment in the Philippines started and ended with exercise in suffrage. President Aquino changed all that.

She said, "Empowering the people means more than just giving them elections every three years. It means enlarging their contact with government beyond elections to its daily workings so that vast resources of one support the initiative of the other and the policies of government are refined by the insights of the people.

By this means the lives of the people shall be constantly improved and the people themselves empowered by the habit of directing their own government. The constant revision of flawed policies and the wider application of good ones are possible only by bringing together the people and the government".

President Aquino brought the government to the people. Together, they proceeded in improving the livelihood projects in the countryside. With economic woes addressed, the involvement of the people in the daily affairs of the government would follow.

Under President Aquino, participative democracy became a reality.

### **People's Own Organizations**

During the Aquino presidency, the NGOs and the government provided the impetus for people's organizations. Since the government gave preference to helping organized groups, the people formed common agendas. Initially, economic.

NGOs like the Philippine Business for Social Progress served as agents for organizing beneficiaries. They oriented, trained, and guided farmers, fisherfolk, wives of rural workers, and even regular office employees to get organized, form cooperatives to avail themselves of government's grants, loans, and other assistance.

During a breakfast meeting with labor groups on May 1, 1991, President Aquino directed the CDA to deputize trade union centers to help Filipino workers to set up their own cooperatives. In a year, 46 unions cum coops were registered with CDA.

Bert Gonzales, Secretary-Treasurer of the NGO KMPI, is of the opinion that "President Aquino had succeeded in building a network of people's organizations that can surpass the most sophisticated network ever built in recent history, the one of the National Democratic Front.....Except that the NDF network has political vision. With President Aquino's people's organizations network, there was no political agenda because she (did) not want a party".

Events that would become historical facts showed that the President hardly needed one. People Power became President Aquino's strong shield against those who wished to destroy democracy .

### **The Kabisig Movement**

In June 1990 President Aquino launched the Kabisig movement. To some sectors in the media, this was another *pakulo*. To dyed-in-the-wool politicians, this was read as the start of a political party for what they insisted as the President's reelection bid.

But to all the criticisms, she said: "Kabisig is not a recent creation. Our movement had its roots four years ago when our people - coming from different sectors - linked arms to bring down a political nemesis. This coming together for a common cause, this linking for arms, we then called 'people power'.

Since ours is a government installed by people power, it was but natural that it should conduct its business using the same people power. In the four years of

presidency, I have seen how our countrymen and our government have worked closely in a partnership whose strength is perhaps unprecedented in our political history.

I have seen how such a partnership of our people and government has transformed the lives of many of our small farmers in the countryside through the thousands of cooperatives formed or reactivated after the February revolution.....I have seen this partnership at work in almost all of our efforts to improve the lives of the poorest among us.

These can only mean one thing: The spirit of EDSA, the soul of people power is alive and well in our land.

By establishing this movement - by calling 'Kabisig' we have merely formalized our people's silent crusade. And, perhaps more important, we are institutionalizing the empowerment of our people. We are institutionalizing our participatory democracy".

Kabisig was also President Aquino's way to honor NGO partners and make partnership a hallmark of performance.

She said, "Kabisig is meant to give recognition to what the NGOs have already been doing and to promote their cause. To those who say that the people were not consulted during Kabisig inception, I say that Kabisig's adopted strategy is from the work of people's organizations in alleviating poverty by fast-tracking the implementation of projects".

In effect, by launching Kabisig, President Aquino gave the signal for the rest of government to extend and support to the efforts of the NGOs and to strengthen their partnership for the benefit of the people.

On hindsight, the activities of the people's organizations dovetailed into the Kabisig. They were a means to prevent any attempt in the future in putting the country under a dictatorship.



She said, "We have declared that in the future, no leader can again take away from our people the right and the power to take part actively in the business of government".

### **NGO Liaison System**

And if the pronouncements regarding the role of NGOs in the business of government was not clear, President Aquino made formal the NGO liaison system.

The NGO liaison system was an interagency body first headed by PMS and Cabinet Secretary Chito Sobrepena. It brought together all the NGO liaison officers of line departments and or agencies to coordinate their respective efforts in enhancing GO-NGO collaboration.

It served as a forum where the NGO liaison officers discussed issues and problems, and shared experiences regarding their partnership with NGOs.

It was formed as an offshoot of the President's directive as embodied under NEDA Board Resolution No. 2 passed in March 1989. The resolution directed each department or agency to designate a specific unit or person in coordinating with non-governments at the national and local levels.

The liaison system adopted the five-point action plan formulated by Secretary Edilberto C. de Jesus and approved by President Aquino as its framework. These were: to develop and maintain database on NGOs, improve access of NGOs on government, set up regular mechanisms for GO-NGO consultations, modify government administrative and auditing participation in government programs and projects, and train and improve capability building of NGOs.

Each NGO liaison officer was tasked to do the following functions: relate with the leaders of the major NGO networks and federations, assist in policy formulation, provide information regarding the progress of their efforts in their department and communicate to their local levels, policy and program developments related to GO-NGO matters.

By June 1992, 70 government departments and agencies had liaison desks.

## Meeting Grounds

During the Aquino presidency, the government and the NGOs worked together for and against various issues – ranging from foreign debt to military bases, from violence to emergency situations.

They formed coalitions or temporary alliances to promote common objectives or demands when an issue was "hot" or "sa oras ng kaguluhan".

The partnership included: the Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform to address the controversy of land transfer and farmers' welfare, the Coalition for Peace to take up militarization and insurgency problems, and the Cordillera People's Alliance to tackle the question of autonomy in the highlands.

Alliances were also formed to squarely face crisis situations. These included the rally at EDSA on December 5, 1989, the Lighting of Candles for Peace, the pooled editorial of national dailies in January 1990 to voice the people's non-support for coup attempts, the people's march and rally at the Ugarte Field to protest violence following the burning of buses during the Welga ng Bayan, and the formation of contingency plans during the Gulf crisis.

The flexing of muscles by the people produced a sense of control over the course of destiny of their nation.

## Open Channels

President Aquino kept the communication channels always open to all sectors. She was in constant touch with the businessmen, as well as with the workers. During the Aquino years, labor unrest dwindled down. Where there were 581 strikes in 1986, this number shrank to 162 by 1991. This fact was attributed to the President's recognition of trade unions as an NGO partner.

Trade unions, opines Bert Gonzales, are "about the only stable institutions for institutionalized people empowerment in the country. They have a long history and are highly organized. They are also the most volatile".

Yet, President Aquino, Gonzales says, succeeded in drawing away the labor sector from two extremes. One extreme were the trade unions which concerned itself with bread and butter issues. Another extreme were unions which demanded structural changes in the society.

In 1986, the Labor Advisory Consultative Council (LACC) was formed to provide as the President's mechanism for consultation and dialogue with the labor sector. The LACC was composed of the different labor leaders in the country. Later, the Kaunlaran ng Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc. (KMPI) became the mechanism for consultation and dialogue.

Sectoral consultations were long, thorough processes. According to those who were involved in the dialogues, each sectoral consultation was treated like a mini-summit meeting. There were prior consultations, smaller meetings, and shuttle diplomacy between the President, usually represented by the PMS, and the various labor groups. Most of the discussions were *magdamagan* (took very long hours).

By the time the meeting with the President took place, extraneous issues have been eliminated, all options have been explored, and the discussion proper always zeroed in on gut issues.

Such meetings, according to KMPI's Bert Gonzales, were fruitful. "Hindi na-frustrate ang mga tao. When President Aquino made a decision, alam n'ya may epekto sa taong bayan. She was very confident. She had a network. That made it easy when she said: I want to talk to the farmers and workers".

The NGO network of President Aquino also proved helpful in the choice of sectoral representatives in Congress and in peace-keeping missions.

### NGOs In Legislation And Peace-keeping

The President is mandated by law to appoint sectoral representatives in Congress. During her first set of appointments, President Aquino made personal choices. But with her second set of appointments, she made use of the network of NGOs. People's organizations, big or small, got involved in the selection process.



With votes spread out, the sectoral representatives became more acceptable to a wider base.

The government also worked hand-in-hand with NGOs in imposing rules and regulations such as pollution control, traffic management, anti-drug, crimewatch, and in the larger quest for peace in the country.

President Aquino created the Office of the Peace Commission which sought nonmilitary means to address the problems of insurgency and the secessionist movement in the country.

The Commission worked closely with the NGOs, mostly human-rights groups, church-based groups, and local neighborhood associations. Their collaboration led to the establishment of peace zones in five insurgency areas, which included Naga City and Sagada.

In Sagada, the erstwhile bucolic tourist haven, the Commission facilitated dialogues between the people and the government agencies concerned, including the military. Sagada as peace zone has held on.

### **Energizing The Bureaucracy**

The hand extended across to the NGOs has not only helped the private sector, it has also redounded well for the government workers. "Nagbalik ang tiwala namin sa gobyerno", says Fr. Mangahas. By reposing worth on them, many government workers have been propelled to reassess, if not, appreciate, their role in nation-building.

Fr. Mangahas' own experience indicated that, through President Aquino's leadership, government employees from DA, DAR, TLRC, LB, NEA, NIA, and Philrice – went out of their way to help. He says they overcame their feeling of doubt and complacency.

The President, asserts Mangahas, "walked in our fields, sat with our farmers, talked to them and exchanged ideas with them.....napakalaking impact ng ganoong

leadership". He says that the President influenced many employees of the government to reach out to the people as she did. "The seeds of sincerity, seeds of really working for the people were sown and eventually grew, flourished, and reborn".

At the same time, private citizens formed the National Coalition for Transparency to cut redtape and reduce demoralization in the front-line agencies. It gave awards to outstanding civil servants in cooperation with other NGOs, the religious, and the academe.

In response, government officials set off Panibagong Sigla 2000 to make their own workforce responsive. In seeking recommendations, suggestions, and new ideas from government employees, it sought to improve the delivery of services to the people.

The most significant development in boosting the morale of government workers was when President Aquino gave the government workers the right to organize and bargain collectively for their wages and benefits like the private employees. On April 30, 1991, the President signed a memorandum of understanding with the Public Sector Compensation and Review Panel, Inc. which granted new benefits to government workers. Among these was the creation of the government employees union's cooperative.

The President, without hesitation, released P10 million from her Social Fund as seed money for the government employees' cooperatives.

The revitalized public sector, now with its own legitimate umbrella organization, has broadened the meaning of people empowerment in the Philippines.

Fr. Mangahas enthuses: 'It's all mainly because of the leaders' image – the doubtless sincerity, the doubtless integrity. Naturally, this developed a certain kind of goodness, a certain kind of positive attitude, and a certain kind of response: let's do it again and let's try it again and this time we do it better because this time we have a good leader".

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# Epilogue

NOBODY KNEW WHAT to believe when Corazon C. Aquino said she would not run for reelection. Her detractors prayed she would not. Her followers wished she would. Besides, they thought, history showed a trend – incumbents always desired to extend their reign. This truism had something to do with the heady feeling of power.

But Corazon Aquino does not bend to history. It would not even be presumptuous to say that she makes it. Besides, she always thought, the power must reside in the people. The President of any nation is only delegated power by the people.

Again, she brought her case to her countrymen. She asked them pointedly if they wanted a continuation of her reforms. Again, they responded. In their hearts, the people chanted her name.

In contrast to 1986, the transfer of the Presidency in 1992 carried an air of pride and dignity – of a race which the world once accused as a bunch of cowards.

By mid-1992, Corazon Aquino has set into motion her own NGO. She is back in the arms of those who really make the destiny of a nation, the people.



## ADDENDUM

### CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR GOVERNMENT-NGO PARTNERSHIP MODES

*Selected Listing*

| YEAR | PARTNERSHIP MODE                                                  | BRIEF DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                            |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1986 | TULONG SA TAO – SELF EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM                | Loan assistance to labor intensive micro enterprises with NGOs as conduits for technical and loan assistance                                                                 |
| 1987 | PRESIDENT'S SOCIAL FUND (Formalized 1988)                         | Financing for NGO-supervised small infrastructure projects (two-room schoolbuildings, potable water systems) and special concerns (literacy programs, livelihood assistance) |
| 1988 | INTEGRATED PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOOD COOPERATIVES SYSTEM                | Soft loans and technical assistance in three major areas: crop production, capability-building and postharvest facilities                                                    |
|      | LIVELIHOOD ENHANCEMENT FOR AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (LEAD) | Grants and technical assistance to facilitate bank loans to organized rural farming and fishing communities                                                                  |
|      | AGRO-INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (AIDA)                        | Government-initiated integrated support services for NGOs of agrarian reform beneficiaries in strategic operating provinces                                                  |
|      | NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM                   | Assistance to rebel returnees which includes livelihood and skills training components                                                                                       |
|      | NATIONAL DISASTER COORDINATING COUNCIL                            | Government linkages with NGOs tapped for relief in times of calamities, planning for disaster preparedness and rehabilitation                                                |
|      | COMMUNITY MORTGAGE PROGRAM                                        | Involvement of urban poor and community associations for socialized housing and formalized land tenure of illegal occupants in government and private properties             |

| YEAR | PARTNERSHIP MODE                                        | BRIEF DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1989 | SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT AREA                                | Government-NGO partnership projects in vulnerable communities                                                                                                                              |
|      | NGO LIAISON SYSTEM                                      | NGO liaison officers / desks in all departments and government offices                                                                                                                     |
|      | EMERGENCY COORDINATING                                  | Government linkages with NGOs tapped in times of destabilization                                                                                                                           |
| 1990 | MEMBERS ASSISTANCE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP | Revolving loan fund for SSS members training and capability building activities; implemented jointly by SSS and PBSP                                                                       |
|      | KABISIG PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT                               | Government-NGO partnerships with greater local government participation                                                                                                                    |
|      | EARTHQUAKE FUND                                         | Patterned after the President's Social Fund, this provides government assistance to NGOs for small infrastructure projects as part of rehabilitation to displaced families and communities |
| 1991 | PINATUBO FUND                                           | Patterned after the PSF and the Earthquake Fund but specifically for those displaced by the Pinatubo eruption                                                                              |
|      | WORKERS FUND                                            | Revolving fund for livelihood projects of the labor sector                                                                                                                                 |
|      | PANIBAGONG SIGLA 2000                                   | Involvement of government associations in energizing the bureaucracy                                                                                                                       |
| 1992 | AIDA II                                                 | Private-sector initiated agro-industrial projects                                                                                                                                          |
|      | GOVERNMENT WORKERS FUND                                 | Revolving fund for government workers' livelihood cooperatives                                                                                                                             |